

St. Gabriel's Church (Old Building)
South side of east bound lane of U. S. Route 422
Douglassville
Berks County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1038

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

ST. GABRIEL'S CHURCH (OLD BUILDING)

Location: Pennsylvania, Berks County, Douglassville, South side of east bound lane of U. S. Route 422.

Present Owner: St. Gabriel's Protestant Episcopal Church, Douglassville, Pennsylvania.

Present Use: Parish Hall and Church School

Brief Statement of Significance: This 1801 building with unusual masonry work is an example of the small churches of rural eastern Pennsylvania.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original owner: Built for and continuously owned by the present owner, St. Gabriel's Protestant Episcopal Church.
2. Date of erection: 1801.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: Originally the church was a single space, one large auditorium with balconies on three sides. This was later divided into upper and lower floors by the addition of a floor at about the balcony level. The original stairway on the right side of the entrance has been replaced with a toilet. The pulpit and altar which were against the long northwest wall opposite the entrance were removed when a later church was built in 1880-1884. This later church is just northwest of the 1801 building, and has replaced it as the place of worship for St. Gabriel's congregation. The congregation plans to restore the 1801 stone building.
4. References: Montgomery, Morton L., History of Berks County in Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Everts, Peck & Richards, 1886) pp. 948-950, 953.

B. Historical Events Connected With The Structure:

Douglassville was settled in the first two decades of the 18th century by Swedish immigrants and called variously Molatton, Malatten or Morlatten. The settlement was later called Warrensburg for Jacob Warren and finally Douglassville for George Douglas. This church is sometimes called St. Gabriel's Molatton.

The first church in Molatton was erected by the Swedish settlers in 1720. The congregation was Lutheran until the end of Muhlenberg's ministry in 1761. The Rev. Alexander Murray from the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts arrived in 1762 to serve Molatton and Reading. The Episcopal church gradually supplanted the Lutheran church among the succeeding generations in Molatton and in 1765 built their own log church next to the "Swedes' Church." The remaining Lutherans in Molatton began worshiping in Amityville where a log church had been built in 1753.

St. Gabriel's log church of 1765 was demolished in 1801 when the stone church was built. The rector at the time the stone church was built was John Armstrong who served St. Gabriel's from 1801-1804.

Prepared by O. R. Overby, Architect
July 1962 - National Park Service

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Old St. Gabriel's Church is a rather small, two story, stone church almost square in plan with a gable roof. Extremely simple in treatment, it is typical of the small Protestant meeting house type. The interior originally was a single space with balconies around three sides. The fabric is sound.

The church is approximately thirty-five by forty feet in size with stone foundations and walls. The rough cut limestone masonry is laid in a very unusual pattern. Large blocks have been laid as a water table and as quoins at the four corners, with the areas between laid in random diagonal courses giving a crude herringbone or diamond pattern to the walls. Door and window heads have flat arches with projecting keystones.

The first floor is completely open with five columns (four original and one later) supporting the later second floor. Originally there were two stairways, on either side of the front door, which led to the balcony. The stairs on the right side of the door have been removed, and a toilet installed in that corner.

The balcony, supported by four turned columns, extended in a U-shape along the north, south, and east walls. The pulpit and altar, placed against the west wall, were removed when the later church was built.

Old St. Gabriel's stands within the stone walled church yard surrounded on the south and east by many early tombstones. The church itself faces east.

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August 15, 1958